PONDER THE IMPROBABLE

2ND WORKSHOP ON

POLITICAL TRANSITIONS AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

REPORT OF A WORKSHOP JOINTLY ORGANIZED BY THE
INSTITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES (IDSS) AND
KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG (KAS)

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Traders Hotel, Singapore
28–29 August 2006

INTRODUCTION

Kwa Chong Guan (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore) welcomed all the participants to the 2nd Workshop on Political Transitions and Political Change in Southeast Asia following up on the workshop in Nov. 2005. He also thanked the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) for generously supporting the project. He highlighted the significance of such a project in better understanding the changes in the political architecture of the states in the Southeast Asian region.

Hadi Soesastro (Centre for Strategic and International Affairs, Indonesia) stated that this workshop comes at a very apt time since the Southeast Asian region has been progressing quite dynamically in terms of experiencing political transitions and changes. He emphasized that these developments have made it very difficult to predict where these changes will lead to. Hence this project is a good opportunity, firstly to find an agreement on what the debates are in order to better analyse the various factors involved in these transformations and secondly, because these developments have important policy implications. He underscored that this workshop also intends to study how to

Hadi Soesastro giving his opening remarks

establish a stable democratic regime whenever such transitions occur, if that is the intended culmination of these transitions. In addition it is meant to investigate what these political upheavals bring about and how to make these transitions work for the people. He therefore

Workshop Chairs/Convenors (left to right): Colin Durkop, Mely Caballero-Anthony, Kwa Chong Guan and Hadi Soesastro

looks forward to the completion of the studies and its eventual publication.

Colin Durkop (Regional Representative, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung) welcomed all the participants and concurred with Soesastro's comments on the significance of such a project. This workshop will help to evaluate whether the processes of political transitions will lead to stagnation or consolidation of democracy and if the gap between the governing and the governed would widen or narrow. It will also study the role of all the actors and the perceptions of the people towards such a process.

Mely Caballero-Anthony (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore) welcomed the research team and all the participants and thanked the Konrad Adenauer Shiftung Foundation for making the project possible. As the convenor of the project, Caballero-Anthony gave a brief background on the project and the previous workshop. She highlighted the pertinent questions that this workshop and the project as a whole attempts to answer which are: (a) whether emerging democracies in the region are resilient or whether these emerging democracies are threatened by weak, failed or authoritarian leadership; (b) determine whether the institutions that underlie these fledgling democratic regimes are strong; and (c) to analyse if democratization has become the defining framework for political development in Southeast Asia.

Caballero-Anthony added that the objective of the project is to develop a conceptual framework for investigating the challenges of political transitions in Southeast Asia and to provide a comparative study of the nature of political transitions taking place in the region. This project ultimately aims to better understand the nature of political change and to identify the key challenges that emerge during the periods of political transformations in developing states.

Session I
Political Transition and Democratic resilience in Indonesia

Rizal Sukma (CSIS, Jakarta) assessed the prospects for democratic consolidation in Indonesia by looking at the nature of political transition and the process of democratization in the country. He observed that Indonesia entered a phase of political transition with the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Although democracy is surviving in Indonesia, it remains very incomplete and the quality of democracy can be strongly debated.

Sukma highlighted the factors that led to the fall of the three decades of the New Order government under the Suharto regime. By mid 1990s the Suharto regime's ability to control and dominate Indonesian politics had begun to erode and there were open challenges, overt resistance, and growing resentment amongst the elite and the masses against his rule. The 1997

Rizal Sukma presenting his paper on Indonesia

economic crisis that swept the region including Indonesia acted as a tipping point and on 21 May 1998 Suharto announced his resignation. The opposition, however, was plagued by internal frictions and was unprepared to serve as a united force. Negotiations within Golkar led to Suharto being replaced by Vice President Habibie. Although the Habibie experiment opened up the political system, it still left the two main pillars of the Suharto regime—the Golkar and the military—in tact and even allowed them to consolidate their position.
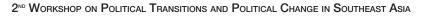
After 1998, the Indonesian political system underwent remarkable transformation. Important changes were made in the area of electoral reform with the introduction of new political laws. For instance, the international community and civil society organizations were allowed to monitor the electoral process. A genuine multiparty system began to take root and the press was no longer subject to tight government control. Though still incomplete, the withdrawal of the military from politics led to healthier military-civilian relations. The devolution of power from the central government to the region allowed for broader autonomy for regional governments to manage their own political affairs. This led to a more balanced relationship between the two. The relationship between the executive and the legislative also saw a transformation with the parliament increasingly become assertive. All these saw a resurgence of democratic practices in Indonesia, which in the past, was crippled by three decades of political suppression and control.

Using the framework on democratic consolidation provided by Andreas Schedler, Sukma examined the progress of Indonesia's democratization process. He studied the anti-democratic behavior during the transition and its impact on the process. He examined the attitude towards democracy among the elites and the public at large and also the socio-economic and institutional bases necessary for democratic consolidation in the state. According to him, Indonesia fairly withstood the threats posed to democracy, like the conflicts in Maluku, North Sulawesi and West Kalimantan during 1999–2001 and the rebellion in Aceh in 1999. Although there were reported abuses committed by both government and military

Colin Durkop (Regional Representative, KAS) and Leonard Sebastian (IDSS) sharing thoughts during tea break with Sorpong Peou (Sophia University, back to camera)

official, these did not reverse the process of democratization. Moreover, there was increasing commitment and support among the elites and the public towards democracy.

He emphasized that various socio-economic problems like high unemployment, increasing poverty and economic inequality posed the biggest problem to the quality and eventually the sustainability of Indonesia's democracy. However, the progress made in re-designing the country's political institutions underpins the survivability of democracy in Indonesia.

The general elections held in 2004 and the election of Susilo Bambang Yudoyono as the first democratically elected president of Indonesia signified the country's significant transition towards democracy. The elections reinforced the non-theocratic nature of Indonesian politics and witnessed the breakdown of patrimonial and traditional authority. The constructive role of the media and the civil society was highly appreciated. Furthermore, the military's commitment to stay away from the electoral process was also demonstrated.

Finally, Sukma concluded that while various problems like economic hardships and fledging political institutions can pose serious challenges, the holding of direct presidential election constitutes the beginning of the end of transition, and could pave the way for Indonesia to enter the democratic consolidation phase.

COMMENTS & DISCUSSIONS

Vedi Hadiz (National University of Singapore, Singapore) observed that the paper had largely followed the framework of a very broad checklist of what has, what has not and what we would like to change in the Indonesian political scene. He expressed his concerns about adopting the assumptions of particular theoretical frameworks. particularly with regards to the question of whether such transitions lead to a liberal form of democracy. He mentioned that maybe there are other forms of democracy that Indonesia might progress towards and it does not have to fall back into authoritarianism.

Looking at the case of Indonesia solely from a particular framework might not shed enough light on the processes of transitions unless if compared with the experiences of other post authoritarian societies like the Philippines or Thailand or even Latin America. He also raised questions about the parameters used to empirically measure Indonesia's journey from political transition to democratic consolidation.

Vedi also stated that analysis should not be just boxed within certain socio-economic indicators. He argued that this should also be extended to various other realms of possibilities which are much more nuanced, sophisticated and could affect the shaping of political structures. Hence, a study of the consolidation of power and interests among different actors and how they shape the trajectories which various societies follow should be done. Analysing various vested interests and elite strategies may suggest that these so-called antidemocratic events are to isolate the region from larger societal problems that are inherent in many other societies.

He stressed that if there are real signs of decline of patrimonial and traditional authority in politics in Indonesia then it needs to be deliberated even further since it has deeper political ramifications. There might be an emergence of new more modern forms of patrimonial politics like the emergence of the radical Muslim groups which needs to be studied.

Leonard Sebastian (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore) suggested that a rich body of literature on the past thirty years of Indonesian politics might be useful to help Sukma grapple coherently with the idea of incomplete transition in Indonesia.

He broadly divided the literature into three specific groups: the literature on "Patron-

client" relationships, "corporatist channels" and on "imbibing" of the interests of the society essentially through absorption or osmosis.

Elaborating on these types of literature, Sebastian noted that the work by Benedict Anderson, where societal interests do not play a major role or influence on the policy process, may be used. Similarly, the "bureaucratic-authoritarian" approaches developed by Donald Emmerson in 1970s argues that certain extra state interests have the ability to influence politics however they are not that significant since the state is extremely powerful.

One participant highlighted that the elites in politics, bureaucracy and military in Indonesia have learnt to live with this democracy. So if consolidation is about persistence of a democratic system then Indonesian democracy has consolidated, albeit operating at a level of low quality. It is this low quality of democracy that enables new democracies to consolidate.

Sukma responded that incomplete transition was indeed the case in Indonesia, because the pillars of the New Order regime were still surviving. The opposition is also still relatively weak. He argues however that these factors do not totally divert effort in the country to consolidate democratic gains. Hence it was not a total diversion from what was happening to influencing Indonesian politics.

SESSION II
THAILAND: FROM COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM TOWARDS ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY?

Thitinan Pongsudhirak (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) argued that Thailand fits the competitive authoritarianism category because of the instrumentality of elections. Between democracy and authoritarianism

Thitinan Pongsudhirak presenting his paper on Thailand

the focus in the case of Thailand should be the latter. Since taking office in January 2001, Thaksin's government had arguably penetrated and captured the institutional configuration and inner-workings of the reform-intended 1997 constitution. Thaksin's disguised and sophisticated authoritarianism has therefore made him the frequent object of dissent from different sections of the Thai population.

On discussing the nature of the political crisis of 2006, Pongsudhirak described it as an inevitable clash between Thaksin's coalition and those who opposed it. Thaksin's growing monopolization of Thai politics, his quest to transform the Thai socio-economic order by emphasizing grassroots populism and his apparent abuses of power—conflicts of interest and corruption—had put him in conflict with the Bangkok elites.

He argued that the Thai crisis shows that "democratic/authoritarian regime classification" is a misplaced exercise with limited fruits of scholarly understanding. Instead of putting a description to the rule, it is more instructive to look at the enabling and the disenabling factors. Thus, it is more helpful to look at the socio-

economic foundations more closely, and to examine how these have changed the political dynamics in the country and thus the nature of political transitions.

Pongsudhirak critiqued the undue emphasis on elections as the principal gauge for democratic assessment and suggested that the more fitting description of Thaksin's rule was of competitive authoritarianism and not electoral democracy, which if not checked, could move towards favour of "hegemonic authoritarianism".

Comments & Discussions

Khoo Boo Teik (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia) remarked that in most of the countries wherever there are some basic, procedural and other substantive democratic indicators, the states can be accepted as democratic regimes, provided that we understood the fact that apart from the procedural and institutional set-up, democracies offer a high degree of public participation in public life, political processes and so on. Hence, while democracies by way of elections and institutions may have

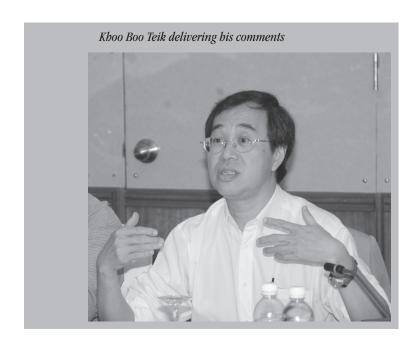*Khoo Boo Teik delivering his comments*

survived, there is nevertheless no pristine form of democracy in the world because democracies as a form of rule and a system of governance can become an instrument to constrain and minimize the degrees of public participation.

Measuring any democratic consolidation based on the parameters of a particular framework tends to be based on a specific understanding of the concept. Thus, any analysis of an incomplete or failed consolidation needing more desperate consolidation like in the case of Thailand, only suggests a limited or a particular school of thought that measures the concept of democracy tied to specific benchmarks.

In the case of Thailand, Khoo argued that it would be wrong to dismiss some of the things Thaksin was doing as wholly undemocratic and vested in provincial interest. Giving an example, Khoo illustrated that Thaksin's attempt to crush parochial influences by offering a party structure was not undemocratic in nature. All the godfathers in the Thai politics were not removed, as Thitinan had suggested, rather quite a few were co-opted within the TRT banner which is not an undemocratic practice.

He noted that a vital precondition to measure democratic consolidation that was missing in the analysis about democratic consolidation is the constant struggle to move towards consolidation. Thus the political crisis due to Thaksin's struggle with the elites and his reliance on the rural mandate is still legitimate and can be read as a struggle to realize that desired democratic consolidation.

One participant highlighted that the issue that has not been incorporated in sufficient analysis is the case of Southern Thailand. Although it is a separatist movement it still draws attention to how democratic politics have not been able to deal with this problem which is still very central to find any political consolidation in Thailand.
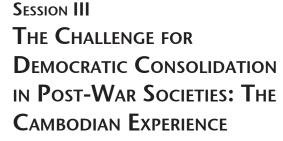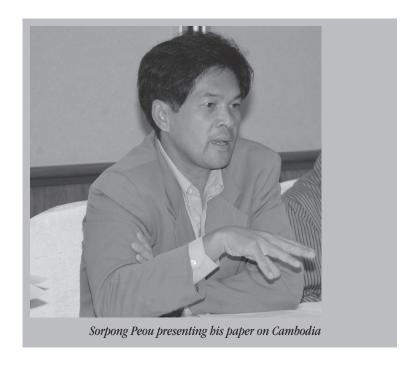
A participant remarked that the paper was quite descriptive, especially with regards to the de-institutionalization of democratic and institutional power in Thailand. He urged for more explanation on the "process of de-institutionalization" of democratic power arguing that this issue needs to be addressed either by evaluating the variables like cultural order or economic inequality or security issues.

Comparing the current situation in Thailand to Australia, one participant also pointed out that arguments about Thaksin's overwhelming control over both the houses in parliament and the capacity to "ram-through" any legislation do not really make him undemocratic. If one looks at Australia where the current government wields similar support, the impression might be different.

Sorpong Peou presenting his paper on Cambodia

SESSION III
THE CHALLENGE FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN POST-WAR SOCIETIES: THE CAMBODIAN EXPERIENCE

In his presentation, **Sorpong Peou** (Sophia University, Japan) explored the challenges behind institution building in war-torn societies like Cambodia. According to him, the most important variable that impedes democratization is serious institutional weakness at the state, political, and civil society levels.

By tracing the Cambodian experience in democratization from the early 1990s to the present, Peou argued that there has been a failure of democratic consolidation when the opportunity arose in the early 1990s. Since the 1997 coup, the country has since experienced democratic stagnation and is moving towards the monopolization of power by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). This is evident with the erosion of accountability and transparency, the co-opting and silencing of opposition, and the consolidation of personal power under Hun Sen.

Secondly, Peou examined the persistence of weak institutional checks and balances in Cambodian politics. Successful institutionalization is achieved when the organizations and procedures become politically independent, organizationally effective, influential and sustainable. However, in Cambodia's case, the new state, political and civil society institutions that emerged after the 1993 elections were subsequently rendered weak and inefficient by the ruling elite's grip on personal power. Institution building has also been impeded by factors such as the lack of bureaucratic will, legitimacy deficit of government ministries and weak civil society.

Thirdly, Peou outlined the structural impediments and democratic consolidation such as an autocratic culture, a socialist legacy, the extreme destruction of the state, political and civil society institutions, and hegemonic power politics

and poverty. These factors further entrench the rule of the CPP and perpetuate inefficiency and corruption that are not conducive for democratic institutions to mature.

He concluded that the best that Cambodia can currently hope for is political stability rather than democratic consolidation as there is no incentive for the political elite to strengthen the institutions at the expense of curtailing their personal power.

COMMENTS & DISCUSSIONS

Ake Tangsupvattana (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) commented that there is a need to explore the issue of democratic consolidation by focusing on multiple rather than a single factor. He also noted a paradox in Cambodia's electoral democracy as weak democratic institutions actually facilitated the monopolization of power in the hands of the elites. He raised two points. Firstly, their flaws aside, was it possible that the CPP had a better capacity for providing for the people than the other parties? Secondly, the Thai experience has indicated that institution-building alone may impede rather than consolidate democracy. Hence the process of unblocking institutional impediments, rather than the proliferation of institutions itself could be the key to deepening democracy in Cambodia.

One of the participants asked what kind of political system Cambodia should have embraced after the Vietnam occupation. He wondered whether democracy as defined by the international community was the most suitable system for the Cambodians to adopt since from the experiences of the Eastern European countries, democratic elections have to be complemented with an acceptance of market capitalism. Both required competition, which Cambodia may not have been prepared for at that point in time. Another participant asked about the kinds of interests that preside over the

institutions that do not behave as expected.

Peou explained that in Cambodia, no one can penetrate the CPP and there are no institutional checks and balances to curtail their power. Therefore, while interests explain why parties pursue power, it does not explain the process of monopolizing it. He goes on to argue that the Khmer Rogue atrocities were a by-product of the absence of democratic institutions. However, Cambodia should not be pushed to accept democracy when the key actors are not ready.

Another problem is that capitalism, which is usually implemented in tandem with democracy, works against the poor. Moreover, the donor communities may not necessarily be interested in instituting democracy in Cambodia. Instead, they tend to be more interested in political stability for the development of capitalism for investment. This has led some to support any regime that provides that, including authoritarian ones.

A participant wanted to know what indicators of democracy would be relevant to Cambodia since the current institutions patterned after western models do not guarantee it. Peou suggested that the current system be reinforced with the institutionalization of a strong multi-party parliamentary system to check the powers of the status quo. A point was also raised for the need to look beyond western models and concepts to analyse the region.

SESSION IV
SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM: THE TRAVAILS OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Herman Joseph Kraft (University of Philippines) traced the factors that influenced the democratization process in

the Philippines since the overthrow of the Marcos administration. He argues that since then, the transition to democracy has failed to bring about lasting political stability, responsive governance, and an economic environment conducive to growth and the spread of wealth. Yet, democracy remains the preferred system for most Filipinos, albeit with "strong" leadership.

Despite calls for changes in the structure of the political system from the current presidential system to a parliamentary one, meaningful changes have been hampered by the persistence of a weak Philippine state that is unable to formulate and implement policies independent of powerful vested interest groups. Moreover, the Philippine experience indicates that the democratic polity can erode democracy as much as they can consolidate, resulting in a state of uncertainty.

Aside from elite political domination, Kraft identified other emerging forces that have influenced the nature of the political system namely: major commercial and industrial conglomerates, an active civil society, and the bureaucracy itself. While the period immediately following the Marcos era was an opportune time for reforms, few materialized or were sustainable. Attempts at economic liberalization and industrialization were hampered by leftist ideologues and self-serving protectionist interests of local capitalists. The lost of confidence in the political institutions can be seen in examples such as the support for Estrada's administration despite evidence of rampant corruption and incompetence. This is currently aggravated by the Arroyo government's inability to face up to the corrupt practices of the bureaucracy and military.

Kraft reiterated that despite awareness among the people that democracy is not working as it should, there is still the preferred system of governance among the Filipinos. If so, he concluded by asking if the current system is sustainable in view of the divide between the general public and those in power, especially in the event of a downturn in the economy or more political scandals. He opined that this system is not tenable unless political reform takes place.

Bob Hadiwinata exchanging his ideas with Herman Kraft

COMMENTS & DISCUSSIONS

Noting the prevailing pessimism, **Bob Hadiwinata** (University of Parahyangan, Indonesia) suggested that more focus should be given to nurturing optimism for democracy in the Philippines in order for consolidation to materialize. While public optimism for democracy may be high as reflected by opinion polls, the question is whether or not this can be sustained given the weaknesses of the current institutions. How the country can go about consolidating democracy should be more explicitly explored.

Hadiwinata also questioned the assumption that a strong government is good for democracy based solely on the fact that a weak government is not. Are there any examples of how a strong government is actually good for democracy? The role of civil society in weakening the legitimacy of the state could also be explored as some of their campaigns portray the government in a negative light.

The notion of "democracy" needs a clearer definition. For example, are street demonstrations leading to the toppling of the government more democratic than achieving the same end through constitutional means, or does it undermine the very democratic institutions that it claims to defend?

Moreover, what are the alternative forms of promoting democracy, if not the current approach? Kraft suggested that the lack of alternatives may be a way forward as the current opposition is too weak to overthrow Arroyo's administration. Hence it is now ideal for the President to push for reform if she wants to as it is unlikely to face opposition.

In view of the recurring theme of elites co-opting the institution-building process to their personal advantage at the expense of weakening the states, it was suggested that a solution could be to focus on capacity-building rather than the mere proliferation of institutions. However, it was highlighted that capacity-building is often hampered by those in power.

Another participant pointed out that states have to be realistic in their pursuit of democracy as there is no ideal that suits all countries and there should be room for compromises. While there is a need to question the state to ensure accountability, the question is how this should be carried out. Moreover, the rule of law is often difficult to implement not because states are weak but because it is not in the interests of the elites to comply.
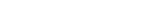
While Kraft has argued that a strong multi-party system is necessary for consolidation, the Indonesian experience seemed since to indicate such a system does not guarantee the desired outcomes. Hence there could be other factors that is hampering consolidation that have yet to be identified.

As to whether or not strong institutions are necessarily good for democracy in the Philippines, Kraft posited that the focus on capacity building should be on institutions that carry out public service rather than those that promote the interests of the elites.

SESSION V
NETWORKED AUTOCRACY: CONSOLIDATING SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

In his case study of Singapore, **Cherian George** (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) reviewed the People Action's Party's (PAP) management of the risks of an autocracy through his framework of a "networked autocracy." The system is autocratic in its centralization of power in the hands of a small number of individual leaders within the executive branch, with few of the institutional checks and balances associated with full-fledge democracies. Yet unlike most

highly centralized states, Singapore's regime has kept itself open and connected—to its mass base to which it remains highly responsive, to elites whom it works hard to co-opt, and to global economic forces with which its policies are kept in tune. It is this "networked" quality where change takes place at a very gradual pace that is carefully managed which makes the system resilient.

Three levels of networking are explored. First, at the individual level, avenues are available for Singaporeans to voice their grievances, such as the Feedback Unit, Meet-the-People's sessions with members of parliament and a more critical press. These are important feedback channels that keep the government attuned to the ground.

Secondly, since the 1980s, the government has plugged itself into various functional groups that are deemed important to policy-making. Such groups dealing with economic development tend to be more institutionalized with strong links at the higher levels while others, such as groups dealing with the arts, are more likely to be engaged through ad hoc channels at closed door events.

Thirdly, from the political economy perspective, the government is clear on its position that Singapore cannot stray far from global economic trends. This in itself provides for a degree of self-correction.

The PAP implicitly subscribes to the political theory that public opinion needs to be mediated and organized by political actors before it can achieve political ends. This is why the flowering of public opinion is allowed but the border between individual expression and mobilized opinion is constantly being policed. George concludes with the opinion that this system might continue to work in the interest of the people as it has developed in the masses high expectations of delivery and also zero tolerance for corruption.

Cherian George presenting his paper on Singapore

COMMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

William Case (City University, Hong Kong) observed that among the case studies, Singapore is an anomaly due to its stability at the political, economic and social fronts. Case is of the opinion that Singapore's political stability can be attributed to performance legitimacy backed by calibrated coercion, and also a range of co-optive and inclusionary strategies to perpetuate compliance.

While analysts of authoritarian regimes tend to focus on the coercive and exclusionary practices, George's paper takes a different approach by focusing on the inclusionary strategies. Case therefore raised two questions. Firstly, how distinctive is Singapore's authoritarian regime from the others and how does the notion of "networked autocracy" help us to understand this? Hence, the concept of "networked autocracy" needs to be more rigorously defined and grounded in theory to answer this.
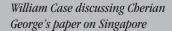
Secondly, there needs to be a clearer description of how the concept of "networked autocracy"
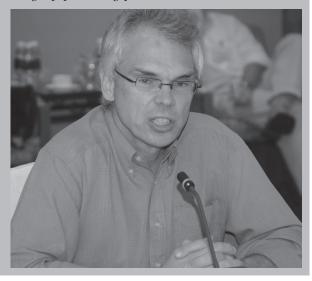
William Case discussing Cherian George's paper on Singapore

works on the ground. Where are the institutional conduits from which the inclusionary activities are supposed to take place? How exactly does the government identify social threats and act in ways to pre-empt them?

Case suggested that the government's approach to moderating the effects of social disparity fuelled by globalization could be explored as a conduit of inclusionary responsiveness implied in networked autocracy. Moreover, the example of the casino debate within Singapore could also illustrate a degree of consultation.

A participant suggested that the concept of a network could be clarified further by identifying the players that are excluded rather than focusing solely on those that are included. Other questions raised were as follows. What is the definition of "civil society"—does it exist in Singapore and if so, why do some civil society groups flourish and others do not? What factors keeps Singapore insulated from the third wave of democratization? How are the "functional groups" identified in the paper involved in governing the masses? Why has the government

been more successful than others in shaping the interests and collective identity of the masses?

It was posited that size could be a factor in consolidating the network as compared to other countries. Another participant pointed out that the Singapore electoral system that disadvantages the opposition.

George highlighted that "networked autocracy" is not a conscious policy. Citing the example of the government tackling the problem of the lower income group, he argues that the government is more responsive than other autocratic rulers. In this sense, the Singapore government has been able to reduce the management risks normally associated with autocratic governments and be more responsive because of the network framework.
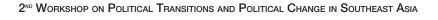
Session VI
Political Transition in Malaysia

Lee Hock Guan (Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore) and **Helen Nesadurai** (Monash University, Malaysia) explored the Malaysian political regime within the framework of a "competitive authoritarian." This hybrid system is competitive in that democratic institutions are in place but is also authoritarian in that opposition forces are handicapped by a highly uneven playing field. Their analysis focused on the political transition from Mahathir Mohamad to Abdullah Badawi in this light.

First, Lee and Nesadurai traced the nature of political transition in Malaysia over the past decade. They posited that the Mahathir era saw the transformation of the system from an "oligarchic collective" to an "autocratic individual" as embodied in Mahathir. The entrenchment of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) were made possible by

factors such as the weak democratic institutions and electoral systems, a responsive-repressive approach to popular opinions and pressures and the political dominance of the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN). Mahathir's handling of the internal divisions within UMNO led to the establishment of his personal hegemony. Nonetheless, this also led to a substantial erosion of UMNO's legitimacy to Malay society, raised demand for greater accountability, transparency and the rejection of corruption and cronyism, and also the galvanization of civil society. These signs demonstrated the limits of Mahathir's autocratic regime.

Secondly, the degree to which that transition has led, or is leading, to the continuation or further consolidation of Malaysia's competitive authoritarian political regime, or the real opening up of democratic space is examined. While the Abdullah Badawi administration has restored the hybrid regime's competitive elements to some degree, the core authoritarian features associated with it remain intact. For example, there is currently greater space for debating issues once deemed sensitive, although this remains a privilege granted by the government rather than a fundamental right.

Lee and Nesadurai concluded that under Abdullah, there is optimism that the competitive authoritarian hybrid regime might be consolidated, with its competitive/democratic elements restored to some degree while core authoritarian features are retained.

Comments & Discussions

In his comments, **Ho Khai Leong** (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) first noted that the elite-driven perspective dominate conventional analyses of changes in Malaysia's political regimes. He asked if more emphasis can be given to other intervening variables such as the management of bureaucracy and relationships within and between political parties.

Secondly, Ho pointed out that the transitions within Mahathir's long tenure itself leading to the consolidation of hegemonic prime ministerial power could have been probed further. This will shed more light on whether the Badawi administration can move forward by facilitating a comparison between the incumbent having to deal with the legacy of a strong predecessor and Mahathir who did not.

Lastly, Ho argued that the role of the bureaucracy deserves further scrutiny as it is both a target of, and obstacle to, reform. The role it plays in the process of political consolidation could be elaborated on.

The following questions were raised by the participants: Does the UMNO Youth have any impact on the consolidation process? Has the alienation of the bureaucracy by Badawi's reforms forced him to review his reforms? Under what conditions do political leaders have incentives in creating a more liberal bureaucracy?

Lee Hock Guan presenting his part of the paper on Malaysia

Will the institutions change or merely lose its capacity as a result of the transition? Could comparisons between Malaysia and Indonesia be made, namely the transitions from Mahathir to Badawi and Suharto to the successive presidents respectively?

On the question of the bureaucracy's capacity to carry out its role, Nesadurai mentioned that it depends on the situation and factors such as available resources and the leadership of the various bureaucratic institutions.

She also observed that Badawi's reforms have resulted in some backlash but generally he still has support. Whether or not he is able to garner support for his reforms depends on the kinds of incentives, such as promotions and remunerations, in place for the various parties involved. She added that not all civil society groups in Malaysia are pushing for democratic changes as there are also conservative ones that caution against some proposed measures.

Lee pointed out that any assessment of Badawi's

Helen Nesadurai presenting her part of the paper on Malaysia

administration should take into consideration the fact that he has only been in power for a few years but has inherited a regime that is entrenched in a degree of authoritarianism. In comparison to Mahathir, Badawi does delegate a certain degree of power to his subordinates. However, the Mahathir years have bred inertia in the bureaucracy which is difficult to undo.

On the role of UMNO Youth, Lee cited the example of their paralysis in the Anwar case despite their strong support for him to illustrate their weak role in the consolidation of democracy.

A question was raised if democratization can take place if the perception remains that Malaysia is for the Malays. Nesadurai pointed out that all the Malaysian prime ministers at some point were ultra Malay nationalists but eventually succumb to the reality of the country's multiracialism. However, demographic trends indicate the shrinking of the official minorities so it remains to be seen if this will have an impact on the preservation of the current system.

Concluding Remarks

In view of the diversity of political regimes in Southeast Asia, Hadi Soesastro commented that efforts should be made towards convergence of systems in order to build a regional community. Conversely, would efforts at building a regional community influence the move towards convergence? Democratic consolidation is a process that is characterized by the development of, and interaction among, institutions. In order for consolidation to be effective, the institutions should be built on strong foundations.

In her concluding remarks, Mely Caballero-Anthony noted the varying and chequered experiences of political transitions that are taking place in Southeast Asia. These she argued have made it all the more important
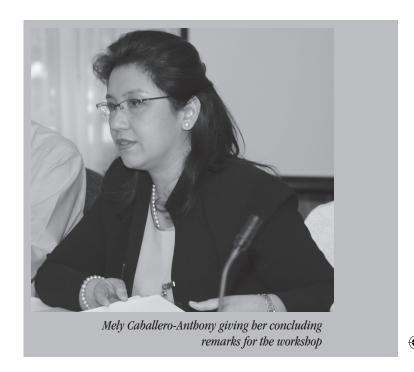
to systematically study the trends in political changes and development in the region. She remarked that while there may have been some reservations with regard to the use of a particular framework, this was nevertheless useful as a point of reference in order to conceptually and comprehensively debate the different experiences of political transitions that is happening around us.

Finally, she highlighted the importance of adopting a systematic approach in any analysis of political transition in the Southeast Asia. These can be done in two ways. First, is to determine whether a transition has indeed taken place and if so, to identify the indicators. An important question to be addressed here is whether the emergence of other actors, such as new leaders and civil society organizations had influenced and changed the political dynamics in the country. Second, if there are transitions, to determine their trajectories—where are they moving toward? She added that it is equally important to analyse the implications of these transitions on the nature of political development in the region. The challenge

therefore is to be able to go beyond analysing the trends within individual countries and to locate them in relation to the other countries in and outside Southeast Asia.

Mely Caballero-Anthony giving her concluding remarks for the workshop

Rapporteurs
Bobby Thomas
Yolanda Chin

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

27 August 2006, Sunday

              Arrivals

1930   Welcoming dinner (The Capers, Regent Hotel)

28 August 2006, Monday

0830   Registration

0930   **Welcoming remarks**

              Kwa Chong Guan
              Head, External Programmes
              Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

              Hadi Soesastro
              Executive Director
              Centre for Strategic & International Studies
              Indonesia

              Colin Durkop
              Regional Representative
              Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Singapore

0945   **Introductory remarks**

              Mely Caballero-Anthony
              Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

1000   **Session I**
Political Transition and Democratic Resilience in Indonesia

Chair:
     Kwa Chong Guan
     Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

Presenter:
     Rizal Sukma
     Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta

Discussants:
     Vedi Hadiz
     National University of Singapore

     Leonard Sebastian
     Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

Session II
Thailand: From Competitive Authorianism to Electoral Democracy?

Chair:
     Kwa Chong Guan
     Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

Presenter:
     Thitinan Pongsudhirak
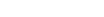   Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Discussant:
     Khoo Boo Teik
     Universiti Sains Malaysia

1230   Lunch (Café Biz)

1400 **Session III**

The Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Post War Societies: The Cambodian Experience

Chair:
Mely Caballero-Anthony
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

Presenter:
Sorpong Peou
Sophia University, Japan

Discussant:
Ake Tangsupvattana
Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Session IV

Something Happened on the Way to the Forum: The Travails of Democratic Consolidation in the Philippines

Chair:
Mely Caballero-Anthony
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore

Presenter:
Herman Kraft
University of Philippines

Discussant:
Bob Hadiwinata
University Parahyangan, Indonesia

1900 Dinner (Spageddies, Tanglin Mall)

29 August 2006, Tuesday

0900 **Session V**

Networked Autocracy: Consolidating Singapore's Political System

Chair:
Hadi Soesastro
Centre for Strategic & International Studies, Indonesia

Presenter:
Cherian George
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Discussant:
William Case
City University of Hong Kong

Session VI

Political Transition in Malaysia

Chair:
Hadi Soesastro
Centre for Strategic & International Studies, Indonesia

Presenters:
Helen E. S. Nesadurai
Monash University, Malaysia

Lee Hock Guan
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Discussant:
Ho Khai Leong
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Concluding remarks

1230 Lunch (Café Biz)

30 August 2006, Wednesday

Departure of international participants

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ABOUT IDSS

The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) was established in July 1996 as an autonomous research institute within the Nanyang Technological University. Its objectives are to:

- Conduct research on security, strategic and international issues.

- Provide general and graduate education in strategic studies, international relations, defence management and defence technology.

- Promote joint and exchange programmes with similar regional and international institutions, and organize seminars/conferences on topics salient to the strategic and policy communities of the Asia-Pacific.

Constituents of IDSS include the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) and the Asian Programme for Negotiation and Conflict Management (APNCM).

RESEARCH
Through its Working Paper Series, *IDSS Commentaries* and other publications, the Institute seeks to share its research findings with the strategic studies and defence policy communities. The Institute's researchers are also encouraged to publish their writings in refereed journals. The focus of research is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region. The Institute has also established the S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies (named after Singapore's first Foreign Minister), to bring distinguished scholars to participate in the work of the Institute. Previous holders of the Chair include Professors Stephen Walt (Harvard University), Jack Snyder (Columbia University), Wang Jisi (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), Alastair Iain Johnston (Harvard University) and John Mearsheimer (University of Chicago). A Visiting Research Fellow Programme also enables overseas scholars to carry out related research in the Institute.

TEACHING
The Institute provides educational opportunities at an advanced level to professionals from both the private and public sectors in Singapore as well as overseas through graduate programmes, namely, the Master of Science in Strategic Studies, the Master of Science in International Relations and the Master of Science in International Political Economy. These programmes are conducted fulltime and part-time by an international faculty. The Institute also has a Doctoral programme for research in these fields of study. In addition to these graduate programmes, the Institute also teaches various modules in courses conducted by the SAFTI Military Institute, SAF Warrant Officers' School, Civil Defence Academy, and the Defence and Home Affairs Ministries. The Institute also runs a one-semester course on "The International Relations of the Asia Pacific" for undergraduates in NTU.

NETWORKING
The Institute convenes workshops, seminars and colloquia on aspects of international relations and security development that are of contemporary and historical significance. Highlights of the Institute's activities include a regular Colloquium on Strategic Trends in the 21st Century, the annual Asia Pacific Programme for Senior Military Officers (APPSMO) and the biennial Asia Pacific Security Conference. IDSS staff participate in Track II security dialogues and scholarly conferences in the Asia-Pacific. IDSS has contacts and collaborations with many international think tanks and research institutes throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. The Institute has also participated in research projects funded by the Ford Foundation and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. It also serves as the Secretariat for the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), Singapore. Through these activities, the Institute aims to develop and nurture a network of researchers whose collaborative efforts will yield new insights into security issues of interest to Singapore and the region.

On 1 January 2007, the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies will be upgraded to become the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University.